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Jack Anderson

Soviet Brigade Just Part of Cuba Threat

A Soviet brigade with armored equipment was engaged in maneuvers last month near Havana. The unsuspecting troops should have smiled: They were on candid camera. The U.S. satellite pictures were clear enough to identify which soldiers needed a shave.

This photographic evidence that a Soviet combat brigade was stationed in Cuba caused an uproar in the United States. And the uproar, according to intelligence accounts, caused perplexity in the Kremlin.

Apparently, the Soviet leaders can't understand the fuss. They assume U.S. intelligence agencies have known for years that Cuba has been transformed into a Soviet satrapy. The presence of 2,800 Soviet combat troops in Cuba is one of the lesser threats to U.S. security.

From classified intelligence reports, here's a rundown on some of the other unpleasant Soviet operations in Cuba:

- There is evidence, according to the Defense Intelligence Agency, that the Soviets have established "an independent fighter unit in Cuba." About 20 Soviet pilots turned up in Cuba in February 1976. They began flying Mig21 fighter planes, declares a secret report, "out of San Antonio de los Baños airfield just south of Havana." Before long, they were conducting "mock combat sorties," the surveillance report states.

- Soviet pilots also have been flying regular reconnaissance missions from secret Cuban bases. Soviet re-

connaissance planes, operating out of Guinea and Cuba, have monitored U.S. naval movements in the Atlantic. An intelligence report explains that they have flown "round-robin missions over the central Atlantic... staging from both Cuba and Guinea, performing coordinated flights to the mid-Atlantic." President Carter, meanwhile, called off U.S. reconnaissance flights over Cuba as a gesture of good will.

- The Soviets have established sophisticated communications facilities in Cuba capable of intercepting U.S. microwave telephone conversations. The Pentagon is security conscious and restricts military use of microwave telephones. But intelligence sources suggest that the Soviets may be more interested in monitoring the private conversations of U.S. scientists, industrialists, businessmen and technicians. The Soviets are eager to keep up with U.S. scientific, technological and commercial advances.

- The Soviet KGB directs Cuban intelligence operations throughout Latin America. The DGI, as Fidel Castro's intelligence agency is known, not only gathers intelligence but also spreads communist revolution in the Western hemisphere. The KGB and DGI are collaborating, for example, to undermine democracy in Puerto Rico. Hundreds of Puerto Rican activists have been trained in terrorism inside Cuba.

- For 17 years, the Soviets have been training and supplying the Cuban armed forces. The Soviet

Union maintains 40,000 Cuban soldiers in Africa. They are Cuban by birth only; everything else about them is Soviet. They wear uniforms, carry weapons and draw pay furnished by the Soviet Union. They are flown in Soviet transport planes; they are backed by Soviet naval power; they are supported by Soviet logistics.

This is described in stark detail in a top-secret summary of the joint Soviet-Cuban military operation in faraway Angola. Here are excerpts:

"Moscow's real-world deployments of naval and air assets to the West African littoral represent an increased willingness to direct military forces into areas far removed from the Soviet mainland, to support what the Soviet leadership considers to be key political objectives....

"The eruption of the Angolan civil war presented Moscow with an opportunity to install a government favorable to its interests and intentions in South Africa. The USSR, unopposed, mounted and sustained a large air and seaborne resupply effort which, in conjunction with the introduction of large numbers of Cuban troops, turned the tide of battle in its client's favor.

"This open act of interference in an internal civil war apparently is viewed by Moscow as not inconsistent with its detente policy toward the West and is a clear demonstration of the USSR's determination to assist national liberation movements."